


Grove Lake:
A Flight into the Real World

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Pollard", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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Abstract

Ball State University is known for its amazing Telecommunications program. With awards and state of the art facilities, students are allowed to learn in the best environments. Grove Lake, the Summer HD movie for 2007, was one way that students were able to use their skills and knowledge of the field to produce a feature film. In any major production there are always major and minor mistakes. In order to prevent future mistakes like the ones made during Grove Lake, this thesis clarifies the details of my experience and what I believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of this program. The final movie poster and examples of my work are included in the appendix.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the College of Communication, Information, and Media for giving me the opportunity to be a part of their Summer HD program in the summer of 2007. I was able to work with amazing instructors as well as peers from my college. I would like to thank Mr. Tim Pollard, my thesis adviser, for helping me create the project outline and serving as executive producer on the movie as well. He was extremely easy to work with and always available. Finally, I would like to thank the Ball State Honors College for allowing me to complete this project.

Running Head: GROVE LAKE

Grove Lake:

A Flight into The Real World

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Ball State University

The summer of 2007 was one of the most difficult and stressful summers of my life. No other class or project has pushed me to the limits like working on *Grove Lake*. *Grove Lake* is the title of the past summer's movie that was written, produced, and edited by Ball State University students. Rich Swingley and Tim Pollard created the summer program. The summer HD program is a great asset to Ball State University and has been the most beneficial part of my college experience. This program is only in its third year and there were many mistakes during all forms of productions. In order to prevent future mistakes like the ones made during *Grove Lake*, this thesis clarifies the details of my experience and what I believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of this program.

Ball State University has the equipment and expertise, professors and students alike, which provide the necessary elements to produce a large-scale project. The program began three years ago and has grown each year, resulting in an end product that is beneficial to everyone involved. The university alone is able to use the end product to further their recognition in the academic world. The product can also be used to bring more students to the College of Telecommunications. In turn, the program can bring the university money as well. Inside the college, the program can further develop the department. Professors can enhance their classroom teaching by using it as an example.

As well as being beneficial to the university, it is a great program that benefits the students involved in many ways. Most college students do not know what field of study they want to go into. This is a hands-on program that allows students to figure out their strengths and weaknesses. Because of the many opportunities and types of jobs it offers, the student can gain real life experience. The knowledge they will gain from being a part of a full production from start to finish will be vital for the career they chose. The

program helps the students develop new ways of communicating and organizing, while creating a lasting project that can be used on a resume.

This program was started in the summer of 2005, by two professors. Tim Pollard and Rich Swingley decided to create the program in order to allow students to receive hands on learning experience on a full production. Before any student is allowed to be on the crew, they must first have an interview with one or both of the creators. This is to find if the student meets the requirements of a crewmember. Junior or senior standing, along with the core production classes completed are some of the requirements. Once that is established, the student works with the professor to figure out how they would like to contribute to the crew, whether it is in the audio crew or on the camera crew.

After my interview with Rich Swingley, I had to wait for the results. I was chosen to fill the position of Second Assistant Director. This position is responsible for creating the full production schedule. That means organizing the cast and crew's schedules, as well as working with locations and equipment rental. The 2nd AD also creates the daily call sheets from the production schedule. On set, they are responsible for managing any extras, as well as doing anything that the director or first assistant director requires.

This program is so valuable to the students because it takes them through the entire film making process. In the beginning of the summer, me and twelve other students, along with Rich Swingley, started the tedious process of pre-production. This included revising the script, casting actors, finding locations and not to mention learning how to use the equipment we were given by Ball State. It was up to us to create the message and the script is where that message comes from. Script analysis is a significant part in the pre-production phase.

During this process, a major snag almost shut down the film. Almost two weeks into pre-production, we still didn't have a lead actress cast. The problem was that our script called for several older actors. Older actors are hard to come by when the only incentive is the publicity the movie would receive. The lack of budget did not allow for paid roles. But once we found our leading lady, she came down with a medical emergency and we were forced to recast. Finally, only a few days before production began, Wanita Spence joined the cast of Grove Lake.



On June 5th, 2007, production for Grove Lake began. Our first location was an old motel on the south side of Muncie right off the road. Passersby took interest and we smiled proudly as we explained what we were doing. The first week went very smoothly, as we only used one actor and one location. It was a great way to ease into the heavy production schedule that the film demanded. Since it was my job to schedule everybody, I was very glad that I gave the cast and crew this week to use as a learning experience and to get their feet wet on a project that was only going to get harder. And it did.

When faced with the prospect of filming on water, most crewmembers didn't see the main problem. But, fortunately, we all found out soon enough. Water moves. It moves boats, it moves docks, and it moves ducks and anything else that may get near it. We first planned on having three boats that would all be connected in order to carry all the equipment, crew and cast. But as luck has it, we ended up with one pontoon boat and a small fishing boat. Altogether, there couldn't be more than 10 people on the water at a

time. When there are four cast members called for the scene, which leaves seven crewmembers. That is a very small crew to be able to work with, especially while the water current is working against both boats.

A couple two by fours and some screws attached our two boats. Crewmembers were constantly trying to keep the wood from breaking, while also trying to pay attention



to the surroundings. Because the current was so strong, sometimes our anchors wouldn't stay in place, which caused some major continuity issues. The most terrifying aspect of shooting on the water was the simple fact that there was a very expensive camera along with several thousand dollars worth of other equipment on board. This

made shooting on the water a very nerve-racking experience.

While shooting on the water was difficult, we made it work, and the movie benefited from the hard work that the cast and crew gave to the project. Not only did we have difficulties on water, but also the weather never seemed to cooperate, which made my job as second assistant director and schedule coordinator complicated. At the beginning of the summer, I worked with the director, 1st AD, and producer in order to come up with a shooting schedule. I broke down the script into scenes and made a master schedule for the month, and then I broke it down even further to each week. Each week had all the call times for cast and crew with locations and scene numbers. When we were scheduled to shoot outside and it would be raining, it was up to me to find something to shoot that day. Once we ran out of indoor scenes, we all prayed for good weather. We

had a very limited amount of time to shoot, only seven weeks. An example of a monthly schedule and weekly schedule can be found in the appendix.

Finally, our third major problem was a cast member. A large part of the plot was based on the main character's love for the geese of the town. Mandy, the lead, were annoyed that the geese nests were being destroyed because the birds were a nuisance to the boaters of the town. This would be hard to portray in a movie without showing Mandy interacting with the geese. Amazingly, we found a family that took care of injured geese. They were



willing to let us use them on set. But geese are not actors and do not follow direction well, as we found out. However, the geese really added to the quality of the final product. It made the movie more believable and gave move creditability to the story.

The final part of the movie was bringing together all the footage and editing it to make sense. As one of the 11 editors, it was up to us to pick out the best takes. There was a lot of responsibility to make sure we were doing the movie justice. Because it was a full-length movie, it was divided up into four different sections. Two people worked on a section, while the director and producer oversaw the final edits. We also had a documentary being made as well. Just like in pre-production and production, there was a limited amount of time we had to edit the movie together. The post-production crew was actually a class whose entire job was to finish the movie. There was also another audio class that was in charge of the ADR, music mixing and Foley sound.

Throughout the entire six months that I spent working on *Grove Lake*, I learned a lot about myself, like how I work with people and cope in stressful situations. There were many situations during production that I could have dealt with differently, and problems where I acted correctly. Knowing my strengths and weaknesses can help me in future projects and jobs, and this production catered to learning both.

My first job as second assistant director was to make the shooting schedule during production. This is something that I feel is one of my greatest strengths. I am a highly organized person and did not get overwhelmed with the task of coordinating 20 different schedules. Before this project I didn't know that I love to schedule. Organizing crew times and cast calls, and working with the producer to figure out how long we can spend at one location is something that I enjoy. If it weren't for the Summer HD program, that is something that would have taken me years to realize. It is also a skill that will apply directly to the career I choose.

Another strength that I found on set was my job in working as a buffer. Though it is not necessarily my duty to work between director and crew, I took up the job almost instinctively. There were several times that it benefited the whole crew to have a middleman to work out compromises. I really enjoyed working with the crew and being able to get to know each member and what they needed to do their job. In turn, I would report back to the higher ups in order to get exactly that. This skill will also come in handy in any type of office setting.

Finally, my most helpful strength during the actual production phase, was my availability. If I wasn't on set, I could always be contacted by phone and email. This often helped when equipment got lost or something was forgotten back at the school. I

was able to find it and get it to the crew quickly. Also, because I made the schedules, I knew exactly what time to be on set and who needed to be on set. This meant, I was an extremely punctual crewmember.

As many 'strengths' that I learned during this process, there were just as many weaknesses that I found. Everyone has his or her bad days, on set or off. But it isn't how that person makes up for it; it's how they learn from their bad habits. One of my worst habits on set was yelling. I felt like I was always screaming at the crew, telling them to pick up the pace, to stop goofing around, what scene it was, or that the cup moved during takes. This made for a very sore throat, as well as having a cast and crew that didn't really like me during shooting. But it was my job to keep everyone on schedule, and the only way I knew how to get everyone's attention was to yell. After this summer, I realized that there must be another way to do this without all the screaming.

With me screaming, the director calling cut and the cast memorizing lines, days on set could get extremely hectic. More often than not the cast and crew were confined to small spaces, like a living room or boat, making the noise and frustration levels increase. As second assistant, I had to keep my cool and do whatever the director and assistant director needed. I wasn't allowed time to get angry. Unfortunately, I did. This summer was one of the most stressful jobs that I have ever had to do. It pushed me to my limits in every aspect. We were all lacking of sleep, food and time in the shade, but we had to deal, and I feel that I did not deal as well as other.

Finally, I felt that my participation during the pre-production phase could have been better. Regrettably, I have no ability to think creatively. I look at everything with the logical eye. It is hard for me to picture what the Director of Photography was imagining

in his head, or to accomplish what the Director wanted. I was on a different level altogether and I found it very hard to relate to certain members of the crew.

Everyone on and off set can probably list several of his or her own strengths and weaknesses during this production. But in some cases, it wasn't the fault of the cast or crew. As stated before, this is only the third year the program has been in progress. The format has grown and changed over these few years for the better, but there still are a few kinks to work out.

For example, this production almost didn't get started due to script issues. In the beginning, a student wrote a rough draft that was similar to Grove Lake; however, it was a horror movie. The executive producers thought it was a great start, but felt the story would be better in a different genre. The student gave the script to the program, and it was up to the director and one executive producer to re-write the script. But like life, there were several snags along the way and the script wasn't finished until a couple weeks after shooting even began. This put extra pressure on the director, and myself as the assistant director. Scheduling scenes that haven't been written is a tough job. This also had the trickle down effect and made it difficult for the actors as well.



Another side effect of an unwritten script was the difference of opinion between the now two people writing the script. There was a great age difference between the director, a student, and the executive producer, a professor. This meant that certain things were funny to one writer and not to the other. This meant an even longer script writing

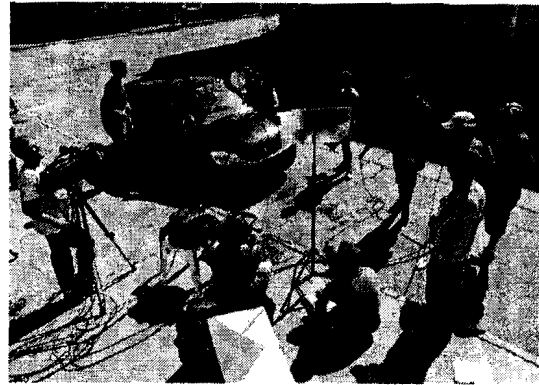
process, trying to make compromises between the two. It is my opinion that since there are several script writing classes, there should be a way to utilize those pieces and have a set script before pre-production has begun. This way, the pre-production phase could be expanded into a spring class, so there is ample time for script analysis and other pre-production to get done.

Another draw back to this program was the lack of budget. The school gave no money to the program, causing the professors and sometimes crew to make out of pocket purchases. This sorely left the crew at the mercy of the location owner because we weren't able to reimburse them for the time spent on their premise. Our first location was a motel outside of Muncie, IN, which required us to pay per hour for the room we used. We also had to rely on actors that were not being paid; they were all there on a voluntary basis. Most had other jobs that created time conflicts. Also, because we were working such long hours, breaks for food were necessary. We had no money to buy the cast and crew food. Sometimes this also came from the executive producer's pockets. We were lucky enough to have several donations by local businesses and were able to have some catering when we had a large group of extras. We also benefited by the donations of Jodi Moisan, a local friend who was also an extra. But because this production is so valuable to the school, it is frustrating that there is no monetary compensation for those who worked so hard.

Hindsight is 20/20 and there are always things that should have or could have been done differently. But this production was an extremely large undertaking for the allotted time given. All cast and crew members worked very hard throughout all three phases. This is what makes this program so amazing. The output is so valuable to

everyone who made any contribution. The faults within the program can be easily remedied and the strengths are far more important.

This summer was at times very difficult, but in the end, the knowledge that I gained from the experience was worth the lack of sleep and sunburn. The project exposed me to all types of people, situations and jobs that I had never encountered. I was able to learn how to use equipment I had never seen and probably won't see until I'm very far advanced in my career. Ball State gave me and other students the opportunity to carry the weight and responsibility of a professional and do professional work without having to go through the rigorous application process. This project is as close to any real world job and lends itself for growth in any particular section of the movie making process.



The real benefit of working on the Summer HD Movie is being able to connect on a different level with students that are in the same position. Everybody is on the same level as a student, but this program forces the group to respect those higher up than oneself. This is extremely practical when it comes to the work place. Just because someone is younger than you doesn't mean they are lower on the totem pole. Working with your peers also lets you get to know people that are of a different specialization. For instance, someone whose focus is in audio may never get the chance to work with someone whose focus is in lighting because there aren't many classes that coincide with each other.

Along with working with different peers, this program also allows for working with different departments inside Ball State University. Because there are so many aspects to a single movie, several different colleges can be connected to help the project succeed, resulting in the whole university backing the movie. For example, when a budget is implemented the project could enlist the help of architecture students to help build the set and find locations. Actors from theater department can be recruited. The score and any theme songs can be written and recorded by the music department. The sales and promotions options can help bring attention to the movie, while the newspaper can write a feature about the production. Also, business majors can be helpful to manage the budgeting and accounting for the project. They can also work with the producer in making release forms for any extras. The food and nutrition majors can become the craft services while the cast and crew are on set. The fashion department can be used to make costumes. The list can keep going. This project has only just begun. There are so many possibilities for furthering the interdepartmental development for the Summer HD Movie.

From goose poop to tripods, the summer of 2007 had it all. It took the hard work of over 200 people over a period of seven months. All who were involved gave a part of themselves, but in return had the pleasure of getting to know some amazing people with true talent. In the years to come Grove Lake will gather dust on the shelf where it sits, but it will always be the foundation for which all other projects will stand. Ball State University's Summer HD program will grow and have continual success, but only few will know what it was like sitting on a rowboat with a \$10,000 camera or teaching a goose how to act.

Appendix

- A. Movie Poster
- B. Full Schedule
- C. Scene Break Down
- D. Example of Weekly Schedule